

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION COMMISSION ON  
ACCREDITATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT  
AT THE IOWA BRAILLE AND SIGHT SAVING SCHOOL**

**Action Requested:** Receive the accreditation report from the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School and the Statewide System for Vision Services.

**Executive Summary:** The Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School (1) completed the Standards Assessment Report which required an in-depth self-assessment that addressed the standards for accreditation defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had an on-site visit by certified Quality Assurance Review team members. IBSSS was accredited for the maximum five-year period allowed by the accrediting body without interim visits required. IBSSS must submit a progress report in 2011 to document progress on the recommendation.

This accreditation report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan objective (1.1) to “offer high-quality programs through ongoing program improvement for undergraduate, graduate, professional, and non-degree students and special school students” and priority (4.0) “to demonstrate public accountability and effective stewardship of resources.”

**Background:**

- ◇ **Description.** School accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation, reflection, and improvement. It invites external scrutiny and welcomes the constructive feedback of peers. It demands rigor, is based on data, and systematically documents results.
- ◇ **Accrediting Agency.** The institutional accrediting body is the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement which is a subsidiary of AdvancEd, an organization that represents 23,000 public and private schools and districts in 30 states and 65 countries. To earn and maintain accreditation, schools must meet the seven AdvancEd standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness; engage in continuous improvement; and demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.
- ◇ **Review Process.** The self-assessment prepared by IBSSS addressed the seven AdvancED standards for accreditation – vision and purpose; governance and leadership; teaching and learning; documenting and using results; resources and support systems; stakeholder communications and relationships; and commitment to continuous improvement.
- ◇ **On-Site Team Report.** In May 2009, the visiting team determined that IBSSS met six of the seven standards required for accreditation. IBSSS did not meet the standard for accreditation on Standard 4 (Documenting and Using Results); it earned the overall assessment level of “Emerging.”

◇ Commendations Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School is commended for the knowledge, experience, caring, and commitment of the staff in providing the programs to meet the needs of blind and visually impaired students in the state of Iowa. Programs include Quality Program for the Visually Impaired (QPVI), Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), 5<sup>th</sup> Year Program, and the Iowa Braille School Student Behavior Design Program.”
- ☑ “The school and the statewide system are commended for the commitment to and implementation of a significant number of collaborative teams that regularly work together to provide for the many and varied needs of students in Iowa who are blind and/or visually impaired. Those teams include: Deaf/Blind Team, Multiple Impairments Team, Consultant’s Team, Orientation and Mobility Learning Community, Teachers of the Visually Impaired Learning Community, Communication Team, Low Vision Services Team, Management Team, and the Cabinet. The collaboration of people in these various teams is a great strength of the system.”
- ☑ “Laying the ground work and preparation for being able to move the classrooms from the Iowa Braille School to the Vinton-Shellsburg school facilities is commendable. Students will have the benefit of being with their age-appropriate peers and still have the support provided by staff at the Iowa Braille School.”
- ☑ “The Iowa Braille School is commended for the movement toward the Statewide System for Vision Services and the establishment of the necessary components that allow the system to place visually impaired students in their home schools. Also noted is the work of the management team in the linking of the Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, local schools and school districts, Board of Regents, and Iowa Braille School.”

◇ Recommendation for Improvement Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “Systematically collect and analyze program data throughout the statewide system that will be used to improve programs and determine individual improvement.”

◇ Strengths Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “The mission and vision is very specific; is multi faceted, and is monitored and implemented through the statewide system. The leadership, through the Coordinating Council for Vision Services, is cultivating a sense of transparency by developing the document “Preferred Future for Vision Services in Iowa.”
- ☑ “The recent development of the statewide system and the management team have created an opportunity for expanded, collaborative leadership along with a more effective means to serve students who are blind and/or visually impaired throughout the state.”
- ☑ “The school has developed communication teams and established a process to keep staff informed in the educational process of the statewide system.”
- ☑ “The school has developed and adopted research-based curriculum and instructional programs.”
- ☑ “The school provides for students who need assistance beyond the core curriculum through the ECC and a fifth-year program.”

- “The school continues to increase the use of the local school by moving classrooms into the local school during the upcoming school year.”
  - “Regular professional development is provided to ensure staff is trained to monitor student progress.”
  - “Resources from a variety of sources are being used to meet the needs of a relatively small number of students who need very specific, focused services and educational programs. These services are being provided across the state in local schools and communities for most students, but some are provided at the Iowa Braille School. Both service delivery methods are very important components of the entire system that provides for the needs of visually impaired/blind students throughout the state.”
  - “Collaboration of many agencies, including the Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Braille School, Area Education Agencies, and local schools and school districts is a strength of the system.”
  - “The management team is working collaboratively to ensure that appropriate services are provided across the state, and each represented agency is actively involved in providing those services along with valuable information to the appropriate constituents regarding those services.”
  - “The annual state-wide Fall Vision Conference and Spring Vision Conference are conducted focused on parent and family needs and support systems. Parents interviewed expressed appreciation for the networking opportunities and support systems that are developed through those conferences.”
  - “The recent emergence of the Statewide System for Vision Services and the establishment of the management team are significant positive steps that are beginning to improve and better coordinate services to visually impaired students across Iowa. Providing services and support for students and their parents in their home communities, whenever possible, is a definite strength. Careful monitoring and continuous improvement of these services will be of great benefit to involved students.”
- ◇ Opportunities for Improvement Identified by the Visiting Team.
- “Publish and advertise the mission and vision for all stakeholders.”
  - “Continue to find ways to collect data for analysis and a mechanism for the reporting of data.”
  - “There is a need for a formal means of evaluating student performance on a statewide basis.”
  - “Investigate means and ways to coordinate more consistent services provided by the Area Education Agencies.”
  - “Systematically collect and analyze program data throughout the statewide system that will be used to improve programs and determine individual improvement.”
  - “Continue the multi-agency collaboration efforts in order to provide even better services and programs for students.”

- ☑ “Ensure that the web page redesign includes ways for parents and other constituents to easily access information about services available to them and develop a statewide effort to encourage use of the web page by parents, students, and involved agency staff members.”
- ☑ “Study the need for and develop additional methods of involving parents and students when appropriate in discussion regarding continuous improvement efforts focused on needed services for students.”
- ◇ Accreditation Status. In May 2009, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement awarded continued accreditation to the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School and the Statewide System for Vision Services for the maximum period of five years without a required interim visit. A progress report must be submitted by the School in 2011 to document progress on the recommendation identified by the Visiting Team.